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*What mean you by this Service?*

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# Q U E S T I O N

PROPOSED and DISCUSSED

IN A

# S E R M O N,

PREACHED ON THE LATE

GENERAL FAST.

BY JOHN MARTIN.

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## Exodus XIIth. 26.

— *What mean you by this Service?*

IT was foreseen, that the children of Israel, when called to the annual solemnity of the passover, would ask their immediate parents, what they meant by that service: who were commanded to give them a plain and proper answer. “ Ye shall say, it is the sacrifice of the Lord’s passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.”

I ACKNOWLEDGE, it would be improper for me, at this time, to treat professedly of the Jewish passover. But, I hope, I shall not incur the charge of being imprudent, if I take the liberty to introduce from these words, the following observations:

I WOULD first observe, that those services which are of divine appointment, are significant, and replete with meaning; and,

that they who regard them, should enquire, what was originally intended by such solemn services.

I WOULD further observe, That when we, ourselves, practically regard any institution, which we believe to be Divine, we have some end in view; and, that it becomes us to consider, whether that which we mean by our obedience, accords and coincides with the meaning of the Most High.

ENQUIRIES like these, claim our attention in every duty: not less under the present dispensation of the gospel, than if we had existed under the past.—If then, in every service, such questions deserve our notice, ought we not, in so singular and solemn a service as this, to ask ourselves what we mean, and with what view we are come together on this occasion?

FASTING and prayer are of Divine appointment. In this light, the first and best of men, in every age, have occasionally attended to these duties. “ Sanctify a fast, “ call a solemn assembly; gather the elders, and all the inhabitants of the land “ into the house of the Lord your God,

" and cry unto the Lord \* ;" this is the language of the Old-Testament. " As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted †," is the language of the New.

IT is true, that formerly, as well as at present, fasting and prayer have been perverted by the leaven of hypocrisy. But does it, therefore, cease to be a duty ? We are convinced it does not, by our Lord's advice respecting private fasts, which it will be our wisdom to regard in every fast we keep. Thus the counsel of Christ stands on record for our instruction : " Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance : for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face ; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly †."

AMONG the many, engaged as we are this day, probably different meanings are

\* Joel i. 14. † Acts xiii. 2. † Matt. vi. 16, 17, 18.  
indulged.

indulged. But what is that to us? Why should we perplex ourselves concerning others, or indulge uncharitable suspicions of any? The question which it becomes us to ask, and which we should endeavour to answer, is this, what do *we* mean by *this* service?—This question is, I confess, not that which is proposed in the text, but it does not stand in opposition to it; nor will this accommodation of the words to our present purpose, guarded as above, lead any from the true meaning of that memorable sentence. The single question then, now to be discussed, is, what do *we ourselves mean*, by engaging in the extraordinary service of this day?

i. Do we mean to *obtain* any thing from the Almighty, from the supposed *merit* of our waiting on him by fasting and prayer?

I HOPE, this is not the meaning of any person present. I am sure it is not mine. Our services, the whole of them, are confessedly imperfect: for such services, shall we dare to think, that God is our debtor? Besides, we are either under a covenant of grace, or under a covenant of works; if

if we are under a covenant of grace, by that covenant, the merit of man is annihilated; if we are under a covenant of works, remember, that this covenant is a broken covenant: at first, it demanded perfect obedience; afterwards, when sin had entered into the world, with the original claim, it required, and still requires, satisfaction for our numerous offences: if so, what place can be found for actions like ours to merit any thing under this broken covenant? He that can discover any merit in them, on account of which, one judgment should be averted, or a title to one blessing procured, will discover that, which I am by no means able to discern. It is true, God is very gracious at the voice of the cry of his people. But certainly, grace from God, does not suppose merit in us. I have long thought it supposes the reverse. What that is, which a display of the grace of God to us supposes, we, my brethren, have repeatedly, this day confessed: for we have been unanimous, and cordial, in the confession of our *fins*. Let us, therefore, rejoice, not that there is any merit in us to balance our crimes, but, that there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared\*. This

\* Ps. cxxx. 4.

is a fact; but that we are able to obtain any thing from him, as the reward of our merit, this is false.—The promised reward is not reckoned of debt, but of grace.

2. Do we mean to *mock* the Almighty by attending to this service?—*God forbid!*

IT may seem unkind to ask this question: But I beg you will recollect, that horrid as the idea seems, this has been done repeatedly. What can we think of the fast appointed by *Jezebel*, at which, and also by that mean, *Naboth* was slain \*? What can we think of those fasts concerning which it is said, they were for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness †? Or of those, that were so severely, and yet so justly censured by Jesus Christ ‡?—It is true, accurately speaking, “ God is not “ mocked.” But we are often said to do what we desire and endeavour to effect, and are treated accordingly; unless the grace of God interposes. Now, in actions of this nature, what has been done, may be done again. It is our duty, therefore, to be cautious.—The best way to prevent

\* 1 Kings xxi. 9—14.    † If. lviii. 4.    ‡ Matt. vi. 16.

every insult of this nature, is to be jealous of our own hearts; to examine them with care, and to entreat, that whatever we do not obtain, we may not be denied that grace whereby we may serve God with reverence, and with godly fear.\*—My language on this subject, is not the language of censure; from that, your own conduct exempts you; but it is, as I conceive, the language of prudent affection, which, I am persuaded, you will not reject.

3. Do we mean by this service to *offend*, or *flatter* our *superiors*?

WERE this our design, is it possible to imagine that such an intention could escape the notice of the all-seeing eye, or that such behaviour could be discerned with approbation? Shall we give just cause of offence to them, by whom we are protected? This would be ungrateful. Shall we treat them with contempt, whom we are commanded to obey †? This would be impious. Shall we provoke and insult them for whom we are exhorted to make intercession ‡? This would expose us to the charge of hypocrisy.—But, shall we flatter those superiors

\* Heb. xii. 28. † Rom. xiii. 1—7. ‡ 1 Tim. ii. 1—3.

whom we may not offend ? This would be to affront the Almighty, and expose ourselves to his providential vengeance. Let us not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let us give flattering titles to men ; in so doing, our Maker would soon take us away \*. For myself, I charitably believe, and have reason to conclude, that our king neither expects nor approves of the most oblique strokes of flattery in the offices of devotion. If any man does, he deserves to be disappointed.

4. Do we mean by this service to be *partizans* in *popular debates*, and to offer the unhallowed incense of *political passions* to God, in the form of *fervent prayer* ?

HITHERTO, my brethren, you have been much better employed. Something more serious, more solemn ; something far more consistent, both with your profession, and with the Divine Providence, you have kept in view in your confessions and supplications †. And, I should be very sorry, in-

\* Job xxxii. 21, 22. † It is usual with us, and others, in these extraordinary services, for several of the members of the church to engage in prayer ; after which, the pastor delivers a sermon, and concludes the public service by engaging in prayer himself.

deed, if, now the service of the day is fallen into my hands, I should either disgrace, or disturb your devotion. You have trusted me with the management of the remaining part of this service, and I will endeavour to be faithful to my trust.

IT is high time to recollect, that the original question, proposed to be discussed at the beginning of this discourse, yet remains unanswered. I, indeed; can only answer that question for myself. And this, to satisfy my own conscience, I have attempted. But it gives me real pleasure to find, that what I meant by this service, was your meaning also. What I intended by it was,

I. To *justify* God.

II. To *pray* for those blessings which we have not, or have not in such a measure as pious men could wish; and,

III. To be *thankful*, truly thankful, for those blessings which are yet continued with us.

And this, give me leave to repeat it, now appears to have been our mutual intention.—

Are we, however, on *this day only*, to be thus employed? I hope not. I will, then, endeavour to recall the ideas I have mentioned, and under each attempt to add something, which may confirm us in our present resolutions.

I. WE mean by this service to *justify* God.

WHENEVER we are chastened and corrected of the Lord, this, I think, is our first, our capital duty. It is admitted by most, that we now are, as a nation, under the chastening hand of the Almighty. Believing this, if we do not acknowledge that our chastisements are just, we censure him whose stripes we feel.—Infidels, I know, are willing to imagine, that affliction cometh forth of the dust, and that trouble springeth out of the ground: but rejecting such impiety, and being delivered from such ignorance; believing both a general and particular providence, what is *our* duty?—To *justify* God. You grant it; yet, some may be disposed to ask, In what manner, and by what acts, ought we, in the present state of things, to justify God?—We ought to do this, by acknowledging his dominion over

us, and his indisputable right to chastise us in such a manner as seems good in his sight. We ought to do it, by confessing our transgressions publicly; and still more particularly in private; and by declaring, that we have deserved, not only all we feel and fear, but that it is owing, entirely owing to the mercy of the Almighty, that such sinners are not consumed. — Further, we ought to acknowledge, that our chastisements, all of them, accord with justice, and are blended with mercy; nay more, that they are wise as well as kind: or that they are from the Lord, the effects, not of caprice or cruelty, but of wisdom and compassion. It is if need be, that real Christians are in heaviness through manifold temptations †. And we are assured, that God chastises such for their profit \*; therefore, if upon the whole, we are losers by afflictive dispensations, it is probably owing either to our ignorance, our insolence, or to our infidelity. “ All things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose §;” and they who justify him, and accept of that perfect righteousness by which he justifieth the ungodly, are, apparently, of that number.

† 1 Peter, i. 6. \* Heb. xii. 10. § Rom. viii. 28.

If our acknowledgements of the dominion and grace of God be sincere, and if the confessions of our own guilt be consistent, they will be connected with repentance, patience and reformation. We shall mourn over our own iniquities, as well as mention them; and be ready and willing to say, that we will bear the indignation of the Lord, because we have sinned against him \*. The goodness of God, which is always conspicuous to the humble, will lead us to repentance; and repentance, if genuine and evangelical, will produce real reformation.—Thus ought we to *justify* God.

LET him who only perceives general truths, attempt to justify his Maker: but let us, who profess to be Christians, do this, and every thing else, with an eye to the mediation of Jesus Christ.—Confession of sin, without faith in Christ, will probably issue in presumption, or in despair. Repentance and reformation, without faith in him, will, as probably, be fuel for our pride. Christ is the immediate source and centre of all that is excellent in the practice of piety. Of the situation of such as never heard of his name, we know enough to make us thankful for Christianity; but too little to sit in judgment on their future

state. But where Christ is preached and rejected, there, I am persuaded, is either open profaneness, or only the appearance of piety, supported by pharisaical pride.

How reluctant, O how reluctant are men in common, to justify God, in all his ways! “Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities are afflicted \*.” And, what then? If only afflicted, their folly still remains†. Either they are sullen and discontented, or they are so superstitious and haughty, as to imagine, that their tears and tempers, their prayers and promises, their discipline and devotion, can avert impending judgments, and make their peace with God. Is this Christianity? Were *Pagans* to act in this manner, who could wonder? Were *we* thus to act, who might not wonder? May we, therefore, do every thing in the name and faith of our Lord Jesus Christ! Wait on the Lord; but trust in him while you wait on him. Justify him, and though chastened, you shall not be condemned with the world‡. Justify him in all your afflictions, and you shall find, that “with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption §.”

\* Psal. cvii. 17. † Isaiah xlii. 25. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 32.

§ Psal. cxxx, 7. \*

II. WE mean by this service to *pray* for those blessings which we have not, or which we have not in such a measure as pious men could wish.

HE that justifies God in the midst of his judgments, with sincerity, has, or soon will have, that freedom and fervency in approaching the throne of grace, which, giving way to a contrary disposition, it would be impossible to obtain. This fact is established by a blaze of evidence, in the sad, but instructive case of *David*. He keeps silence, but cannot rest. He attempts to justify himself, but has no quiet. He speaks, (hear his language) "Against thee, thee "only, have I sinned, and done this evil in "thy sight." — I say this, "that thou "mighest be justified, and clear from "every censure, when thou judgest\*." Thus, at length he speaks; and then with freedom, and with uncommon energy, he prays to obtain the most important blessings. Let us endeavour to follow his example. Having acknowledged, as a great prophet once did †, that to us belongeth confusion of face; to our king, to our princes, and to our fathers; because we have sinned

\* Psal. li. 4.      † *Daniel.*

against the Lord ; let us not, I beseech you, forget what that great prophet so seasonably recollect'd, “ that to the Lord our God “ belong mercies and forgiveness, though “ we have rebelled against him \*.” Firmly confiding in this, and other declarations of the Divine mercy to the guilty, what should hinder us from making supplication for such blessings as we have not, or have not in such a measure as pious men could wish ?—I say, as *pious* men could wish ; for, men who are strangers to piety, and who have no relish for its pleasures, will naturally desire what godly men would dread. What they would shudder at, would, in too many instances, cause those to shout for joy.

THE destruction of our national enemies is, I fear, the ardent wish of some. I cannot, however, indulge a desire like this. I wish their conversion, and not their destruction. I desire it, both in a civil and in a moral sense. I ardently wish, that rebellion both to God and man might cease ; and, that envy and ambition, pride and oppression, might at once expire ! Till then, may our enemies, abroad or at home, be unable to

\* Dan. ix. 9.

injure us, and we unwilling to injure them ! Continuing to be what they are, may they be subdued, but not destroyed !

THE three great blessings which, as a nation, we seem to want, are *Peace*, *Purity*, and *Humility*. What ideas I now include in these terms, permit me to mention.

By *Peace*, I mean a state of pacification with those powers with which we are at war. *America*, *France*, *Spain*, *Holland*; these, all these powers, are in a state of hostility with us; and we, without a second, in a state of hostility with them. This is a mournful subject for meditation. Considered as a calamity, it is awful. The source of this calamity is awful. Its duration, and the manner in which it has been augmented and prolonged, makes it truly alarming, and shows, that peace, national peace, is greatly to be desired. That blessing is the gift of God. To pray, therefore, that war may cease to the ends of the earth, and that we may soon and long enjoy, on terms both equitable and wise, peace with our foreign enemies, and peace among ourselves; this, surely, is one

great blessing which we should incessantly implore.

BUT he who prays for peace, perversely prays, if, while thus employed, he willingly disturbs the portion of tranquility that yet remains amongst us, and endeavours to augment those animosities and divisions, which are, already, by far too great. Why should we add hypocrisy to a haughty temper? Yet, if vexatious to the state, to religious societies, or to those with whom we deal, or with whom we dwell; indulging such a temper, is it not hypocritical to pray for peace? If it be by the use of means that we are led to the enjoyment of any blessing, those means will either be regarded, or the blessing connected with them, will, comparatively speaking, be despised. Every thing is best sought when it is sought in its proper order, and in due connection. Peace of conscience, is essential to a proper improvement of peace in any other view. He that does not value peace with God, will either not have, or not improve as he ought, the blessings of peace and friendship with his fellow-creatures. Pray for the peace of your country; but endeavour to do this with peace of conscience, by

faith in the Mediation of Jesus Christ.—Pray for the peace of your country ; but at the same time, if it be possible, live peaceably with all men.—Pray for the peace of your country ; but let the congregation where you worship, have just occasion to say, that you are men of peace.—Pray for the peace of your country ; but let the peace of your families, or of the families in which you reside, be that which you study to preserve, and endeavour to promote.—To seem importunate for peace on this public occasion in the house of God, and to be found in our own houses vexatious wasps, or malignant vipers, would be horribly inconsistent. May we ever be preserved from the appearance of such incongruity !

By *Purity*, I mean purity of doctrine, purity of disposition, and purity of conversation. These blessings, or this blessing thus modified, is much wanted in Great Britain.—He who has the Bible, has indeed, in it, the purest doctrines that were ever delivered to mankind. But it is our misfortune, it is more, it is our shame, that those doctrines are treated as they are by some, from whom better things might have been expected. By some, the capital truths

truths of revelation are denied ; and by others, they are derided. By some, they are ironically distorted ; by others, they are either artfully concealed, or partially represented. By characters superior to these, they are stated correctly indeed, but in a manner so cold, so dry, and so abstracted, that conscience feels not the unanimated sound ; and but few, very few perceive, under such lifeless declamations, that doctrines thus stated, were ever intended to produce practical resolutions. But when with greater measures of light and love ; when, with the energy of the Holy Ghost, the gospel shall be preached in its primitive simplicity, then, as formerly, it shall be found the power of God to salvation.

WHILE things continue as above described, (which every competent judge will say, is no exaggerated description), what wonder ; I say, what wonder is it, that there are such visible defects in purity of disposition and conversation ? Ought any man, who lives in the eighteenth century, to be surprised, that insolence should be connected with infidelity ? Or, that corrupt doctrine should produce corrupt conversation ? Sound doctrine may be perverted ;

verted; but false doctrine, can produce nothing that will mend the morals of mankind.—If so, let us pray, that with peace, we may have purity; and, that with deliverance from distress, we may obtain such a reformation of manners, as results from a renovation of mind. This connection appears important; for, if the doctrine which we embrace be corrupt, whether it be political, or theological, depraved *are* our dispositions, and corrupt *will* be our conversation.—Long may they live, whoever they are, that promulge purity of sentiment to society! Greatly may they be ashamed, be who they may, who maintain the innocence of error, or who disseminate the tares of unsound doctrine among men!

By *Humility*, I mean that disposition which inclines us to think, and speak of ourselves, with sobriety and modesty, and to treat others with meekness and benevolence; and which, whenever we speak to the Divine Being, or of him, engages us to do it with delight, and with the deepest reverence. Devoid of this disposition, we may possess, indeed, an appearance of holiness sufficient to deceive many; but genuine

nuine purity is at no greater distance from any person than from him who is habitually haughty: such a man, were he to dwell in the mansions of peace and plenty, would be both unholy and unhappy. Be ye therefore, clothed with humility. May this blessing, so much wanted amongst us, be ardently sought, and always estimated, according to its real and relative value! From national, as well as from personal pride, may we be preserved! God may afflict, but he will never hurt the humble. Let us "humble ourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time \*!"

HITHERTO, we have dwelt on the duties of *confession* and *supplication*. But are these duties to exhaust our strength? Is no other duty compatible with the solemnity of this day? Have we no cause, or have we no inclination to be *thankful*? It cannot be said that we have no cause, nor shall it be said that we are without an inclination; For,

\* 1 Pet. v. 6.

III. WE mean by this service to be *truly thankful* for those blessings, which, notwithstanding our accumulated guilt, are yet continued with us.

THOSE blessings are neither few, nor inconsiderable. But were we stripped of every thing, except a well-founded hope of immortal happiness; had we nothing left us but a sense of sin, and a hope of mercy; (the former *serious*, and the latter *stedfast*) we should be inexcusably ungrateful if we did not allot some part of this service to the duty of praise. A venerable prophet said, “ although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation \* !” Shall we then be unwilling to rejoice in the Lord, or be reluctant to praise him, and speak well of his Name? No, were our outward circumstances dreadful as those described by the prophet’s pen, ingratitude ought not to

\* Habakkuk iii. 17.

have dominion over us; even in that deplorable state, were it ours, we ought to present our supplications with thanksgiving. But, thanks be to God! that lamentable condition is not ours. We are yet exempted from those calamities; we are surrounded with many blessings. May this awake our gratitude!

1. LET us be thankful, that our native country is *exempted* from being *the seat of war.*

FOREIGN invasions, and civil war, have frequently alarmed, and violently agitated the inhabitants of this country. Our predecessors have seen the frontiers of this invaded island covered with sanguinary foes. Rapid and irresistible as an overwhelming flood, they rushed forward, slaying or subduing all before them!—Our forefathers have witnessed the rage of civil fury; the vestiges of which remain to this hour, in almost every county, and every city in this kingdom. What alarms, what battles, what mournful events, what a train of miseries those dreadful days produced! Are we exempted from this carnage, and from this confusion, and shall we be unthankful?

No, for this we will be thankful to the Lord of Hosts ; without whose permission no host can be assembled, nor without it, can any army be dispersed. At such expressions an infidel may *sneer* ; but it forms no inconsiderable part of our praise to Almighty God, that we ourselves, are not fettered in the horrid chains of infidelity.

2. LET us be thankful, that our country is *exempted* from *famine*, and from *pestilence*.

THESE are tremendous judgments. Dreadful, however, as they always are, they have been experienced in this kingdom. In this kingdom, the force of famine has been felt ; and the pestilence, with greater fury has chastised all ranks of men. This great city has sighed under the weight of that awful judgment; nor could flight, though precipitate, preserve the timid or the strong. As they fled, they carried with them the mortal contagion, and communicated to many the seeds of death. Gentler judgments have been more recently inflicted. The *influenza* lives in the remembrance of most who hear me. Why was it so short in its duration, and so limited in its fatal ef-

fects? Who sent amongst us those noxious vapours, and restrained and checked the spreading evil? Some cold head, and colder heart, will gravely say, *It was according to the course and laws of nature.*—Be it so: yet let me ask, what is nature? What its laws, and what its course? Is this course, are those laws, independent of the Almighty? *Indeed!* What then is dependent on Him? But if they were by Him arranged, and are by Him preserved, there is nothing fortuitous. All is under his management, every thing is under his control!—To Him, therefore, 'who rolls the stars along,' who bindeth the sweet influences of the PLEIADES, and looseth the bands of ORION, who bringeth forth MAZZAROTH in his season, and guideth ARCTURUS with his sons; to Him, who knoweth the ordinances of heaven, and setteth the dominion thereof on the earth \*, to Him let us all be thankful, that our land yields her increase, that our harvests are plenteous, that our air is wholesome, and that our lives are spared!—These mercies, at any time, would demand our praise; but, at this time, when our taxes are augmented, and our trade diminished; when our fears are many, and our foes are more; at such a

\* Job xxxviii. 31. 33.

period as this, who can do less than look on these remaining mercies with gladness, and speak of them with gratitude and praise !

3. LET us be thankful, that our *civil* and *religious* liberties remain inviolate; and in a greater measure than in any *other* country.

L I B E R T Y consists in doing what we *please*. But its real value consists, in doing what we *ought*. Liberty, in every society, must of necessity be limited: for, no society on earth now is, or ever was, in all respects of the same mind. Law, therefore, is as essential to the well-being of society as liberty. He who chooses to do what he ought not, must be restrained. Were there no restraints for such persons, the most shocking outrages would be committed, and the most abominable anarchy would soon commence. Were there no punishment for *evil doers*, all would be chaos and confusion!—If, then, in society, legal liberty be all that any man but a *mad-man* can expect from the civil power, where shall we find it of greater extent, or better secured than in this kingdom? Were we able to take the wings of the morning, and travel with the sun through every state on which

which he shines, where should we find a greater portion of civil, and of religious liberty, than may now be enjoyed in Great Britain? As to the latter, since that period when *John the Baptist* preached in the wilderness of *Judea*, where has religious liberty in any country, and at any time, equalled that, which is now granted in this nation? In this respect, is there any nation like it? I believe I may safely say, *Not one!*

SHALL we then, who were born, and who dwell in this distinguished country, shall we be insensible of those mercies which so many envy, because we have not, in every respect, all that we could wish?—I hope not. If, however, any before me find it difficult to be thankful, on account of disappointment and distress, let me intreat him to be patient. Recollect, my friend, that he who judges partially, judges falsely. If you would judge of providential dispensations fairly, you would do well to ask yourself this question, Am I more injured, than I have been benefited by society? Ask yourself this question also, Is society more indebted to me, than I am to society? These questions have a tendency to produce patience

patience and humility; and if frequently put, and fully considered, they will perhaps be productive of praise.

4. LET us be thankful, for the *settled magistracy* of this country, and for the ministers of the *gospel* yet *abiding* with us.

THE KING, who is the supreme magistrate of this country, is, I believe, in a moral view, as bright an example to his court, as any of his predecessors since the Revolution \*. I think of this with pleasure.

For,

\* Can he be a *good man*, who is so unfortunate? This is a question, some may be tempted to indulge. And, to weaken the strength of this temptation, I would ask, Were the calamities that attended the reign of *Hezekiah*, any just impeachment of his moral character? Yet, they were great. His kingdom was invaded by a powerful army. The general of that army approached to the gates of Jerusalem, and horribly insulted, and greatly terrified *Hezekiah* and his subjects †.—But, can he be a *good king*, who is so unsuccessful? This question I will also answer with another. Was *Hezekiah* a *good king*, or a *bad one*? I would also beg leave to ask, whether the calamities attending the reign of *Hezekiah*, were sent on his account, or on account of national guilt, accumulated before he came to the throne of Israel? Of which, perhaps,

† 2 Kings xviii. 17, to the end.

For, the morals of a monarch are of moment to the nation in which he lives. Prior to the Revolution, the profligate manners of Charles the Second, greatly insnared this nation. They were imitated by his courtiers, by his citizens, and by the commonality; and to this hour, the kingdom feels the baneful consequences of that reign of duplicity and dissipation.

MONARCHS are but men. But, if vicious men, their examples are, I am perswaded, the most pernicious. I must be allowed, then, to think, that if his majesty's regard for justice, by making the judges independent; for liberty of conscience, by concurring with his parliament to extend that blessing further in this country, than other kings have done in theirs; if these discoveries of his Majesty's disposition, with his well-

haps, both he and his subjects were too insensible, till they were alarmed by providential judgments. Let it be remembered, at least by Christians, that, “ the race is “ not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither “ yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of under-“ standing, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time “ and chance happeneth to them all †.” — The horse “ is prepared against the day of battle, but safety, or “ victory, is of the Lord \*.”

well-known domestic character, be not seen with pleasure, and mentioned with satisfaction, I must be allowed to think, it may be attributed to something vicious in us, of which we ought to be ashamed; but not to any thing that is virtuous, or praise-worthy.— Of her Majesty, in her less public scene of action malice itself, is dumb! All parties unite in her applause. Should we not for this be thankful? We should, and will.

I was speaking of magistrates. And, next to the supreme magistrate of this country, permit me just to mention the judges of the land. It appears to me, that they are an honour to their exalted station. And of this, I think, I am as able to judge as most before me. For their office, I have had a growing regard from my infancy; and have, for many years, occasionally, attended our courts of justice. From what I have seen and known, I may venture to say, when they assume their seats, that much of legal intelligence and integrity, much of patience and humanity are conspicuous. May these fountains in our *British Israel* be so preserved, that *justice* and *equity* may flow amongst us to general satisfaction!

MINISTERS of the gospel, though seen in humbler stations, are not of small importance to society. If this salt should lose its favour, the earth would be more corrupt, and, by abandoned ministers, it would, I believe, be more corrupted also, than most imagine. Of the mischievous effects of a perversion of the gospel ministry, by ministers themselves, every age has exhibited some proofs; and this, I apprehend, is well able to increase the number. Thus to sin, is to sin with vehemence. Who-ever thinks he is *wrong* in *doing wrong*, will ever be timid, and do it but by halves; but he who imagines that *ill-doing* is *well-doing*, acts with *all his might*. Of all the compliments which are paid to vain and vicious men, those which insinuate, that their conduct is religious, are the most soothing to their vanity, and give, even their depraved minds, the highest satisfaction. I sacrifice these concessions to truth. And from the fatal consequences which are connected with an abuse of the gospel ministry, and especially by ministers themselves, I infer, that those ministers who are faithful to their important trust, are a great blessing to mankind. May we then be thankful, that we have so many, (both in the established

blished church of this country, and among those who have thought it their duty to dissent from it), who desire and endeavour, by manifestation of the truth, to commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God ; and, that there are ministers of different denominations amongst us, whose abilities and piety are not concealed ; whose labours the Lord of the harvest is pleased to crown with considerable success. May their number increase ; their lives be spared ; their reputation be preserved ; and, may continued success attend them, in all their humble attempts to evangelize the inhabitants of this country !

BESIDES those blessings which I have enumerated, what a long list, what an immense catalogue of personal, relative, and domestic blessings, demand, yes, and deserve our praise ! An index of those blessings would make a volume ! And we, shall we be unthankful ! With what face, were we so inclined, could we ask for additional favours ? He that is habitually unthankful, is unholy ; and he, can he, in any state, be happy ?

So much for that question which we proposed to discuss, and for what we apprehend

apprehend to be the leading duties of this day. It is our duty to justify God, to pray for the blessings we have mentioned, and to be thankful, truly thankful, for the mercies we have now enumerated.

WE are not, however, only by our lips to be thankful, either to God or man. Gratitude admits of various modes of expression. It may, and if it be genuine, and strong, it will be manifested by our general conduct. Actions, as well as words, and sometimes much better, discover the mind and heart of man. You will naturally recollect, that there is one act of benevolence, which we have always thought it eligible to regard on such a season as this. I mean, compassion to the poor. We fast by choice; they are sometimes, I fear, *constrained* to abstain from such food as may be convenient for them. Let us, if we can, ease their burdens, and alleviate their sorrows. Resignation is, at present, their leading duty; benevolence is ours. And, I hope, you will always be of opinion, that where benevolence is wanting, devotion is defective.—The prayers and the alms of *Cornelius* came up for a memorial before God. And, you know who it is that asks

the following questions.—“ Is it such a  
 “ fast as I have chosen? a day for a man  
 “ to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his  
 “ head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth  
 “ and ashes under him? wilt thou call this  
 “ a fast, and an acceptable day to the  
 “ Lord?—Is not this the fast that I have  
 “ chosen? to loose the bands of wicked-  
 “ ness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to  
 “ let the oppressed go free, and that ye  
 “ break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy  
 “ bread to the hungry, and that thou  
 “ bring the poor that are cast out to thy  
 “ house? when thou seest the naked, that  
 “ thou cover him, and that thou hide not  
 “ thyself from thine own flesh?”—How  
 pleasing, how animating are the following  
 declarations of the Divine favour! “ Then  
 “ shall thy light break forth as the morn-  
 “ ing, and thine health shall spring forth  
 “ speedily: and thy righteousness shall  
 “ go before thee; the glory of the Lord  
 “ shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou  
 “ call, and the Lord shall answer; thou  
 “ shalt cry, and he shall say, here I am:  
 “ if thou take away from the midst of thee  
 “ the yoke, the putting forth of the fin-  
 “ ger, and speaking vanity: and if thou  
 “ draw out thy soul to the hungry, and  
 “ satisfy

" satisfy the afflicted soul ; then shall thy  
 " light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness  
 " be as the noon day. And the Lord shall  
 " guide thee continually, and satisfy thy  
 " soul in drought, and make fat thy bones :  
 " and thou shalt be like a watered garden,  
 " and like a spring of waters, whose wa-  
 " ters fail not. And they that shall be of  
 " thee, shall build the old waste places :  
 " thou shalt raise up the foundations of  
 " many generations ; and thou shalt be  
 " called, the repairer of the breach, the  
 " restorer of paths to dwell in \*."

\* Is. lviii. 5—12.

T H E   E N D.













